

Suggested Remarks
Daniel Miller, Acting Office Chief
USAID/Pacific Islands Regional Office

Opening Ceremony
U.S. Embassy, Port Moresby, New Guinea
October 5, 2011

Good morning.

Honorable Minister of the National Planning and Monitoring
Department, Sam Basil;

Mr. David MacLachlan-Karr, Head of the United Nations
Development Programme;

Ambassador Teddy B. Taylor, who has long championed the
opening of a USAID office in Papua New Guinea. Ambassador,
thank you for your efforts;

My colleagues from the U.S. Embassy here in Port Moresby - all
of you have done so much in the last couple of weeks to make my
arrival, and the opening of this new USAID office, a reality;

I would also like to recognize the other 11 Pacific Island countries
that this USAID Pacific Regional Office will serve;

Representatives from these nations are not able to be here for this
opening, but USAID will be connecting with them as well in the
near future.

To everyone, thank you for taking time from your busy schedules
to be here today.

I am especially pleased to be here. This is an important occasion. It is a historic moment for the U.S. Government and, particularly for the U.S. Agency for International Development. While USAID has been operating programs in the region over the past years, we are now increasing our partnership with the Pacific Islands. After almost 17 years, USAID is reopening our regional office to serve the Pacific Region. This small ceremony today highlights USAID's renewed commitment to the Pacific island countries.

I would like to acknowledge our Government of Papua New Guinea hosts for allowing USAID to open the USAID Pacific Regional Office here in Port Moresby. Minister Basil: Thank you.

Two years ago, at the 2009 U.N. General Assembly, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, announced to Pacific leaders that USAID would be making a renewed commitment to the Pacific. Secretary Clinton's visit to Papua New Guinea last November was a concrete example of the value the United States attaches to our relationship with the people of Papua New Guinea and other Pacific Island nations where we have significant and growing interests.

The July 2011 joint visits of the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Kurt Campbell, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Patrick Walsh, and the USAID Assistant Administrator to the Asia Bureau, Nisha Biswal, underscore the strong commitment the United States has to the Pacific region. Their visits also emphasized the “whole-of-government” approach that the United States pursues now in its engagement with other nations – all concerned U.S. government agencies working together on common goals.

The opening of the USAID office today is an example of the importance the United States places on working with the governments of Papua New Guinea and the other Pacific Island nations in tackling development challenges. Economic growth in the Pacific Region remains low. Per capita incomes are not rising fast enough to lift people out of poverty. Progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 is a real challenge.

The Pacific Islands are some of the most environmentally vulnerable countries in the world. Climate associated disasters such as tropical cyclones, flash floods and droughts impose serious constraints on development in the region, and affect food availability and food security. Climate change imposes an

additional stress that will continue to exacerbate current problems facing agriculture and food security, energy requirements, workforce retention, public health, protection of the environment, and national government stability and security.

The U.S. Government, through USAID, is committed to working in partnership with the governments of the Pacific Island nations to address these development challenges. The opening of the USAID office will allow for better coordination with officials, donors, and non-governmental organizations on a more regular basis. This office will manage Pacific regional environmental and climate change programs, disaster assistance programs for the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the ongoing HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment program here in Papua New Guinea, which supports a continuum of care from prevention to testing to treatment, particularly among high risk groups.

The socio-economic development and environmental challenges are great, but so are the opportunities to work together in new partnerships to solve problems. The opening of this USAID office today means that we are here to listen, to learn, and to work with you. We will collaborate with governments of the Pacific Island

region, with research organizations, other donors, NGOs, and the local people - from the remote highlands of Papua New Guinea, in fishing villages on the shores of small Pacific Islands, and in the region's urban areas.

USAID, in partnership with the people of Pacific Island countries, will seek opportunities to address issues that impede the empowerment of women. We will look to support activities that promote good governance. Together with the people of the Pacific Islands we will be exploring how to mitigate the effects of climate change. We will be searching for innovative ideas and development activities that show real impact. We will also work hard to ensure that our interventions are sustainable.

As an ecologist, I am especially pleased to learn of the incredible biological diversity that Papua New Guinea has. Papua New Guinea has 5% of the world's biodiversity in less than one percent of the world's total land area! And having spent many years trekking in the Himalaya – the highest mountains in the world – I was excited to find out that you have a 14,793 ft. peak here in Papua New Guinea – Mt. Wilhelm. Where else can you hike from sea-level in the tropics to alpine meadows above 14,000 feet in only a few days?

I have also heard about the innovative Motupore Mangrove Research and Planting Center and the exciting work it is doing to restore mangrove forests. I look forward to visiting the Center in the near future. I understand that Papua New Guinea is the world's center of marine biodiversity, with some of the richest coral reefs on the planet. USAID already supports the Coral Triangle Initiative in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and I am interested to visit Kimbe Bay here in Papua New Guinea to find out more about that project and to learn how we can do more to help you preserve your rich marine biodiversity.

I know there are many successful community-based efforts out there and we in USAID want to learn more about these local initiatives. We are interested in working with communities to support their ideas and efforts. But, in addition to the ideas and efforts of local people, we also need the scientific knowledge of foresters, agronomists, environmental specialists, marine biologists, and even economists. Now, more than ever, new partnerships between people and organizations are needed to tackle the development challenges facing the Pacific Islands. So, I am looking forward to hearing your ideas on how we can collaborate and form alliances.

Forging partnerships is core to USAID's development approach. Working in partnership towards a common goal we can achieve much more than we can working individually. And with the opening of this office today, we are here to continue the process.

Thank you and I look forward to engaging more with all of you in the future.